

# **BARTON BROAD OPEN REGATTA**

## **A Short History**

### **Barton Open Regatta Presidents:**

Sir Edward Preston 1926 – 1952

HT Percival 1952 – 1966

Stanley Utting 1966 – 1981

John Crockett 1981 – 1985

Brian Bush 1985 – 2000

Ian Masters 2000 -

The sun was shining and there was a pleasant west wind as boats and sailors gathered for the first Barton Broad Open Regatta since before the First World War.

But the wind blew up and short sails were fitted as heavy rain marred the day on April 2, 1920. It is difficult to say when the regatta or water frolics first started at Barton — there are references to wherry racing in 1874— but it is certain that it was going strong in 1914.

The ‘famous old water frolic’ was revived in 1920, having ‘showed no signs of recovery in 1919 but is now back beating records’, says the report in the Eastern Daily Press. It went on to say: ‘This was the first reunion of Barton supporters since August 4, 1914— the historic date of the last regatta’.

And one of the earlier records shows the winner of the Barton Broad Challenge Cup in 1908 was a boat called Icení.

Even then the programme would have looked familiar to present day sailors. The Barton Broad Challenge Cup was being raced for as well as the race for Any Rig or Rating. But there is one thing that has changed — in those days there was a tearing four-round race for motor boats.

The regatta and water frolics gained momentum and in 1926 the Ant Cup was being sailed for and there were four wherries that came to the line — Hilda, Ella, Stalham Trader and Lord Roberts.

The island was more of an island in those days and a structure was built ‘as a convenience’. The event was recorded by the then yachting correspondent: ‘Water frolics have been held there for ages and Barton for wherry racing has passed into a truism. Old stagers recall the time when 13 wherries came up to the line... But Barton owes much of its popularity to the fact that the racing is a mere incident and that the day has a strongly marked social side. Barton, in fact, is just a picnic, and the jolliest one imaginable. The boiled beef of Barton is as tender as chicken. And well to windward of most of the moored boats a band of musicians from Stalham— where the beef comes from — entertained us from a lighter among the reeds.’ The wherries continued to race into the 1930s with less and less starters until in 1932 it was recorded that:

‘In recent years each wherry race has been regarded as a possible last and yesterday there was a rather sad spectacle of a ‘sail over’. The single wherry

went round the broad with 13 on board.' There were races through to 1936 but 1950 seems to have been the last.

'Barton Broad has not seen a wherry race for more than 10 years and for everyone present it was the peak of the day. Albion, with her black sails, got off to a good start and none of the other three wherries in the race could look at her and she won as she pleased.'

Albion was owned by the Norfolk Wherry Trust and the other entries were from Claudian, Ardea and Dragon. In 1951 the wherry race was taken out of the programme.

The motor boat race has also gone the way of the wherries. In the old days it was divided into two sections — over and under 12 mph. In 1961 the Barton Broad Open Regatta Committee decided to discontinue the motor boat race, but, after lengthy discussions, in 1962 it was decided to reinstate it after discussions with the Norfolk Naturalists Trust. It was happy to agree to resumption, according to the minutes of the Open Regatta Committee.

In 1966 the motor boat racing tradition ended at Barton with a stark announcement in the year's programme: 'The committee regret to announce that after 50 years this 20 minute race has had to be cancelled owing to the Bure and Waveney Commissioners new bylaws restricting speed in the area.'

And then there were the silver spoons, engraved with the harnser, that became a collector's item. They were first given in 1952, but even by 1956 they were becoming more difficult to buy and by 1987 it had become impossible. That was the year they disappeared.

Over the years many different aspects of the regatta have come and gone. At the beginning it was known more as a water frolic, with rowing races and five sailing races. But gradually the rowing was overtaken as more and more different sailing boats took to the water. There were special events for juniors, a waterborne treasure hunt and a second day of racing on the Tuesday, which began in 1958, and was finally abandoned in 1979.

The Open Regatta Committee has added more class races to the programme over the years, but has made sure that the tradition of the regatta remains with the any rig or rating and drop and fixed keel races.

The first race for sailing punts was added to the programme in 1927 in a year when there was little wind, but a lot of rain. It was also the year when it was decided to dispense with the services of a band.

And there is an entry in the minutes recording that, as during the First World War, there was no sailing: 'World War Two — for seven summers 1939-1 945 inclusive no regattas.'

In 1930 it was a wet regatta. The Eastern Daily Press reported: 'But Barton this year was only at about half its full strength and many of its visitors were weather-bound on each side of Ludham Bridge and even down the Bure'.

Mr H Bates, described as a local historian, said: 'And my father used to tell me of a regatta over 60 years ago which was either abandoned or postponed.'

The record books for the Open Regatta start in 1926, but there was a committee organising the event before then. At that time Sir Edward Preston, of Beeston Hall, was just starting his second term of office as president. In 1952 Mr H. T. Percival took over the presidency and he was succeeded by Stanley Utting in 1966. John Crockett became president in 1981 being succeeded by Brian Bush, who became president in 1985. He retired in 2000 and the current president is Ian Masters.

The links from the past to the present also continue as the Wherry Trophy sailed for in the mid- 1930s has made a reappearance in 2000 and is now awarded to the Yeoman class.

Much of the information comes from the minute books of the Open Regatta Committee and thanks to the archives of the Eastern Daily Press.

The Open Regatta Committee keeps afloat thanks to the generosity of the vice-presidents, the collection on the broad and the enthusiasm of a small band of committee members.

Julia Carter